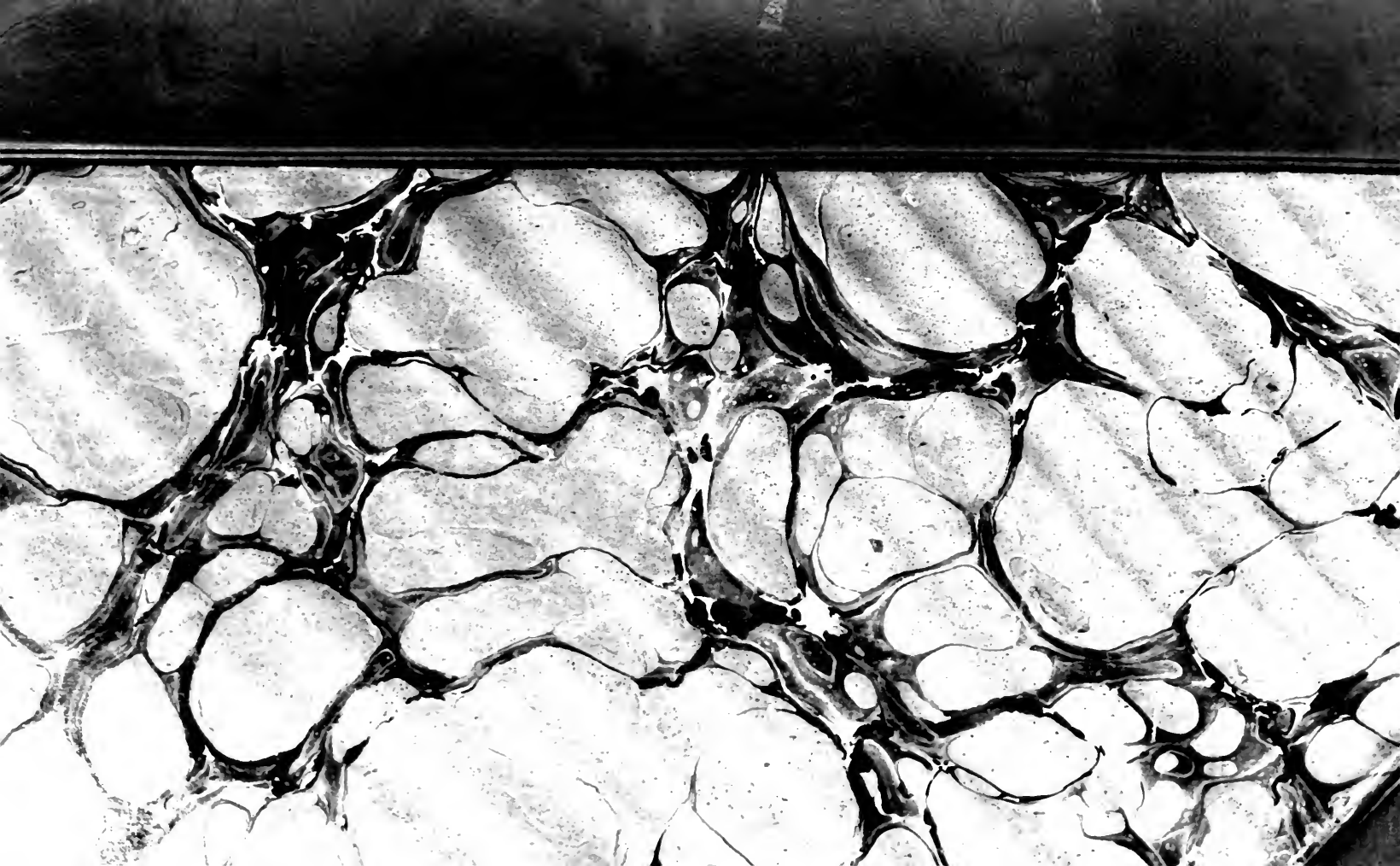

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A SERMON

PREPARED FOR

SUNDAY, MARCH 4, 1876,

BUT THROUGH ILLNESS NOT PREACHED,

ON OCCASION OF

THE DEATH OF LADY AUGUSTA STANLEY,

BY THE LATE

REV. W. CONWAY, M.A.,

CANON OF WESTMINSTER AND RECTOR OF ST. MARGARET'S,

WHO ENTERED INTO HIS OWN REST MARCH 22, 1876,

AGED SIXTY.

"Having a desire to depart, and be with Christ, which is far better."

SEELEY, JACKSON, AND HALLIDAY, 54, FLEET-STREET,
LONDON. MDCCCLXXVI.

THIS sermon is affectionately dedicated to those kind parishioners and friends who, with such loving sympathy, have shared with me and my dear children, the deep sorrow through which we are passing by the loss of their beloved pastor and friend. It is also hoped, that some comfort may be given, through it, to those who mourn the loss of that highly-esteemed lady, in memory of whom this sermon was written, and for whom he had so great a regard, she having so fully entered into the work in which he had been engaged, during the last twelve years, in Westminster.

May he, though dead, yet speak by these words, so as to awaken some, and lead us all to seek more earnestly the "Home" which is above.

E. C.

St. Margaret's Rectory,
April 3rd, 1876.

UIUC

A SERMON.

"*Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.*"—2 Corinthians v. 6.

This chapter speaks of three homes as the Christian's successive dwelling-places; and these homes are connected with the three worlds, or states of being, in which we either do, or are to, sojourn. The first home is the body, called in the first verse "the earthly house of this tabernacle." The second is described as being "with the Lord." It is the home in which the followers of Christ are to dwell in the unseen world, after their departure from this earthly scene. The third is described as "our house which is from heaven," that is, the glorified body which is to be the soul's residence in the eternal world, from the moment

that the dead in Christ are raised at His second coming.

The text refers only to the former two of these three homes—our home in the present life, and our home in the life after death—and both these are mentioned again in the eighth verse, where the Apostle, reversing the words before us, speaks of our being "absent from the body and present with the Lord." The more exact and literal translation of these passages, though less eloquent than our version, is somewhat more forcible, "Whilst we are at home in the body, we are away from home with the Lord." When we are "away from home in the body, we are at home with the Lord." St. Paul's statement in the former half of the chapter declares his full assurance that he would have a glorified body at the Lord's advent, and his earnest "desire" to be clothed with it. He did not desire death, but the Resurrection; and longed for the arrival of the Lord Jesus, before he was overtaken by death. Yet considering the ills of this present state, he was "willing" to depart from the body, and enter on that intermediate state, which is the believer's portion as soon as this life ceases. We too desire the Lord's appearing, as the consummation of our

joys. But while the time of His coming remains a secret, we too are more immediately concerned with the world of sense in which we now live, and with the unseen world which our disembodied spirits are so soon to enter.

This two-fold home is the subject to which I would now direct your thoughts. The idea of home is one so familiar and intelligible to persons of every age and of every class, that we recognize at once the Divine wisdom in suggesting such a figure. The same graphic image was used by Solomon in the Book of Ecclesiastes, where he says, "Man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets."

Every death that happens tells us of such a change of home. Every one who wears the garb of mourning is a silent witness to such a removal. You will not be surprised that the recent departure of that distinguished and excellent lady, who has been so well known and loved in Westminster, should suggest this subject for our contemplation. Long, indeed, have we been anticipating the sad event, and great as is the loss we sustain by it, we can only be thankful for the blessed hope that her "absence," from what she called her "crushed" body, is now "present with the

Lord." Rarely has there been such a life of untiring benevolence, ended by a sickness so distressing and protracted. Perhaps there was not another person in this country so closely associated with the highest and the lowest classes in it; at once the confidential friend of our widowed Queen, and the tender and bountiful helper of the poorest of the poor in Westminster. Scarcely a case of sorrow in this locality, but found its way to Lady Augusta Stanley; and while health permitted, there was scarcely one, whether of rich or poor, she did not personally visit, or in some way comfort by practical sympathy. Her charities were also as wise and discriminating as they were loving and abundant. Her constant interest in our hospital patients, her persevering efforts to increase their comfort, and her success in establishing the important Nursing Institution in connection with it, can never be too strongly or gratefully acknowledged. What she was in private and social life, what a gap her removal made in the circle of those most near and dear to her, I may not dwell upon. I would rather ask you to give God thanks for the gifts and graces He bestowed upon her, and to pray that He will bless her husband with the grace of the Lord

Jesus Christ, and the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit. Her two favourite hymns,* suspended in large type before her eyes through her lengthened illness, proclaim what was her hope and stay amidst the anguish and decay of dissolving nature. All that trial is now over; she is "away from home in the body," and (as we trust) "at home with the Lord."

Let us now for our personal benefit survey this twofold home; as illustrating in the first place

I. Our Condition in this Present World.

(1.) *Here we are at home in the body.*

It is *our dwelling-place.* Our dwelling in the body reminds us that our first care should be for that immortal soul of which the body is only the tenement. Brethren, how shall I adequately impress on you the value of your soul? Your body is fearfully and wonderfully made, and you do right to cherish and sustain it; yet it is soon to return to the dust from which it was taken. Your soul is the breath of God, animating for a little while a clod of earth, but ever to live in a state of conscious happiness or misery, according as it is

* "O God of Bethel by whose hand," and "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds."

in union with Christ or separated from Him. We may learn something of the value of the soul from the price which God has set upon it in the work of redemption. It is sometimes said, but I believe that it is an erroneous expression, that when the eternal Son of God suffered for our sins in the flesh, He purchased for us pardon and reconciliation with God. The teaching of Scripture rather is, not that He purchased salvation for us, but that He purchased us for salvation. I reminded you on Sunday last of the Apostle's words: "The Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood;" and I would beg you to notice how emphatically this is always the language of Holy Scripture. This soul of ours has been lost through sin. It has been redeemed by that sacred blood whose value is infinite. How terrible must be that lost estate, which needed such a ransom! How inconceivably terrible must it be to be lost for ever in spite of that ransom! Brethren, if you have not secured the salvation of your soul, your state is woeful and perilous beyond all that tongue can utter or thought conceive.

But the idea of home embraces more than our own individual safety. The language of the text stretches far beyond any such narrow limits.

The ancients were not a domesticated people to the extent we happily are. They had not the comforts, the resources, the appliances of home which we possess. A Greek's idea of home, as the words here used by St. Paul imply, was identified with the commonwealth to which he belonged. It had reference to the people amongst whom he dwelt, and with whom he had a fellowship both of interests and responsibilities.

So whilst we dwell in the body we have to fulfil the various duties to God and to man which are connected with our worldly calling, and with the various relationships of this life. The greater part of your time must be occupied in these earthly affairs. They are the test of the genuineness of our Christian principles, and the sphere within which we are to manifest them. We are not to go out of the world, but to be in it without being of it. Brethren, ask yourselves, is the world the better for your being in it? When you stand before the judgment-seat of Christ to "receive the things done in the body," will you be placed on the right hand or the left?

But there is another aspect of our condition in this present world.

(2.) *Here we are away from home with the Lord.*

Ever since our Lord's ascension, He has

been withdrawn from our bodily vision. Hence St. Paul says immediately after the text, "we walk by faith, not by sight." We are so much the creatures of sense, that it is hard to realize any object which is beyond the apprehension of our senses. Our blessed Lord prepared His disciples for this separation, when He said, "Me ye have not always." Yet on the whole we are certainly gainers rather than losers by His removal. The glorious body of our risen Lord could be only in one place at one time. He therefore said it was "expedient that He should go away," in order that the Holy Spirit might be sent to abide with each and all of His disciples. What then (you may ask) is the meaning of His own address to His disciples, when on the point of leaving them, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world"? It is that till His personal return, He is with us by His Holy Spirit, and that the Spirit's office is to take of the things of Christ, and show them unto us, as if He Himself were here. And this the Spirit does through the exercise of faith, wrought in us by His indwelling presence. The walk of faith is therefore a walk of prayer, of watchfulness, of study of the word; at best a walk of obscurity compared with the glory which

is to be revealed. Now, as the Apostle says, "we labour," that we may be accepted of Him when He comes again. There was a vast difference between the taste of the grapes of Eshcol granted to God's ancient people in the wilderness, and in their after residence amidst its vineyards. We are now "away from home with the Lord." Be not surprised, then, Christian brethren, if sometimes you find it difficult to realize an unseen Saviour. The children of the bride-chamber must mourn the bridegroom's absence. "Faith" is now to be our actuating principle. We are to endure, as seeing Him who is invisible. Seek then, brethren, for a more abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon your soul, that your faith may be strong and vigorous, and your discernment of unseen things more clear, and your improvement of them more uniform and abiding.

Now let us pass to the other consideration suggested by this twofold home.

II. Our Condition in the Unseen World.

There we shall be

(1.) *Away from home in the body.*

Death is the spirit's departure from its earthly house; and the Christian's death is constantly set

before us in this light. When St. Paul spoke of his approaching martyrdom he did not dwell upon the pangs of execution, but looked beyond them, as he exclaimed, "The time of my departure is at hand!" Men could persecute, imprison, injure him up to the moment of that release, but then the body and the world were left behind. This is an instructive view of death, both to the saved and to the unsaved.

Here, on the one hand, is a child of this world, absorbed in its employments—it may be, engrossed by its amusements—or in hot pursuit of its honours and preferments. Suddenly the scene drops. He must turn from everything which has occupied his thoughts and his anxieties. He must leave the state of probation in which he has been placed. "All his thoughts perish"—his schemes, his ambitions, his purposes are in an instant arrested. His opportunities of securing the salvation of his soul, and serving his generation according to the will of God, are abruptly terminated. There is no repentance for him in the unknown regions beyond. He will never hear the Gospel sound again. He will never be besought to be reconciled to God. He will never be striven with by the Holy Spirit any more. He will never again be addressed by the

Saviour's merciful invitation, "Come unto me and I will give you rest" Whence this total change in his condition? He is gone "away from home in the body." You sometimes see a house shut up and empty. It was once an active scene of busy occupation. The inmates were engaged in the matters which interested or concerned them. But now you knock at the door, and there is none to open; you call, but there is no answer. The home is abandoned; all is silent and desolate within. So, brethren, will it soon be with ourselves. The heart will have ceased to beat, the hands to work, the ear to listen, and the tongue to speak. Friends will look on you and say, "He is gone." You will be "away from home in the body." Oh! how poor does the world appear in such a prospect! How transcendently important this uncertain time of your sojourn in the flesh, when it is regarded as the only time in which you can make provision for the eternity beyond!

Here, on the other hand, is a child of God; one born of the Spirit of God, who lived the life of God; one who was sensible of the value of the soul, of its ruin by the fall, and its redemption by the blood; one who trusted in Christ, and lived a life of faith and holiness, of conflict with sin and of service to

God. It may have been a life of much outward and inward trial; of personal, of family, of social affliction. The heart has known its own bitterness. The world has been no genial friend. The flesh has warred against the soul. But now has come a marvellous transition. The bodily home is broken up. All worldly connexions are severed. "The wicked cease to trouble," either by "fears within or fightings without." The spirit has started on its journey. Thus far the light of nature and of observation is our guide. But here nature and observation end. Revelation alone can throw a light upon what follows. The believer's soul is not alone in that separation from its earthly home. Angels never seen before, ministering spirits who all along have ministered to the heir of salvation, stand ready to carry away the departed spirit.

And now comes into view the other reality of the Christian's condition in the unseen world. There

(2.) *We shall be at home with the Lord.*

We are told nothing of the place of our sojourn. This home has but one revealed feature: it is "with Christ." We shall be in near and conscious companionship with Him. The gladness of the disciples after His resurrection was

consummated when "they saw the Lord;" and there can be no greater boon, no richer distinction, no holier enjoyment, than to be "with Him." During His earthly ministry, while yet He was at home in the natural body, He said, "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me, and where I am there shall also My servant be." And now the follower of Christ passes by the same route, which the Divine Forerunner has traversed, to the same blessed home. This is a sufficient guarantee that the intermediate state after death is not a state of insensibility. To be "with Christ" is to have communion with Him, to be still in His service, and, by a necessary consequence, to have communion with all those who are where He is. It matters not where the place may be, or how disembodied spirits can realize what are now unseen things. The "home with the Lord" must be a home replete with every blessing of which "the spirits of the just made perfect" are capable of partaking, in the interval which separates our home in this mortal body from our home in the immortal body; and when the Saviour comes back to earth again, all who have been "with Him" will accompany Him on His return. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him."

When the Apostle Paul had related in the 4th chapter of the 1st Epistle to the Thessalonians this final account of the Christian's entering on his heavenly home, he added, "Wherefore comfort one another with these words." The word translated "comfort" is sometimes rendered "exhort." And the Apostle's intention takes in both these ideas.

Let this prospect then afford us *consolation*. "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Whether you contemplate the departure of friends, or the departure which awaits yourself, you may thankfully welcome the better home which awaits you. How will your praises there abound to the God of all grace who has brought you thither? How will you delight in reunion with many you have loved below? How will you rejoice when you are made like to your Redeemer, by seeing Him as He is? Christian brethren, is not yours an enviable portion? Shall not the ills of your pilgrimage, however great, seem small, when compared with the glory which is to follow?

But we may find *exhortation*, as well as consolation, in these anticipations. Should they not

bring conviction to the consciences of those of you who are bartering the precious inheritance which may be yours throughout eternal ages, for the money, or the honour, or the pleasure of a passing world? Will you not give diligence now to make sure your calling and election to this blessed state? If you are to be "with Christ" in that future home, you must have Him "with you" now, while yet at home in the body. Oh let every one of you be stirred to seek, and to seek until you find, the personal knowledge of Christ as your Saviour. And let none imagine this attainment to be beyond your reach, when the Saviour Himself is crying: "Behold! I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

C. A. Macintosh, Printer, Great New-street, London.